

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

Alexander Gomez,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Trustees Of Columbia University, and
544 West 11th STR LLC,

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, ALEXANDER GOMEZ (“Plaintiff”), by his undersigned counsel, hereby files this Complaint and sues Defendants, TRUSTEES OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY and 544 WEST 113T H STR LLC (“Defendants”), for injunctive relief pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12181, *et seq.*, (hereinafter, the “ADA”) and the ADA’s Accessibility Guidelines, 28 C.F.R. Part 36 (hereinafter, the “ADAAG”).

JURISDICTION

1. This Court has original jurisdiction over the action pursuant to 28 U.S.C., §§1331 and 1343 for Plaintiff’s claims arising under 42 U.S.C. § 12181. *et seq.*, based upon Defendants’ violations of Title III of the ADA (see also, 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202).

2. Plaintiff currently resides in Bronx, New York, and is *sui juris*. Plaintiff is a qualified individual with disabilities under the ADA. Plaintiff suffers from a spinal cord T-12 injury and as a result is bound to ambulate in a wheelchair.

3. Defendant, TRUSTEES OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, is a Trust and transacts business in the State of New York and within this judicial district. Defendant, TRUSTEES OF

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, is the owner of the real property which is the subject of this action located at 544 W 113th St, New York, NY 10025 (hereinafter “Subject Property” or “Facility”).

4. Defendant, 544 WEST 113TH STR LLC, is a domestic limited liability company and transacts business in the State of New York and within this judicial district. Defendant, 544 WEST 113TH STR LLC, is the lessee and operator of the business known as SYMPOSIUM located at 544 W 113th St, New York, NY 10025 (hereinafter the “Facility”).

5. Plaintiff has visited the Subject Property which forms the basis of this lawsuit around the end of October 2024, and again on or about January 15, 2025. On both of these occasions, the Plaintiff’s ability to ambulate through the entrance of the Subject Property was constrained, hindered, and thwarted by the structural barriers, to wit; a descending set of five or six concrete steps directly interceding between the entrance doors of the facility, and that which was incompatible for his wheeled ambulation. More specifically, for purposes of this suit, the stair case was entirely unnavigable for Plaintiff’s wheelchair during his multiple visits. After coming upon the architectural barrier step, it was entirely untraversable, and thus prevented him from accessing the public services therewithin

6. The Plaintiff plans to return to the Subject Property to avail himself of the goods and services offered to the public at the Subject Property, and thereby determine whether the Subject Property has been made ADA compliant. Plaintiff’s access to the Facility and/or full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and/or accommodations offered therein was denied and/or limited because of these disabilities, and Plaintiff will be denied and/or limited in the future unless and until Defendants are compelled to desist their policy of wilful indifference and remove the physical barriers to access and ADA

violations which exist at the Facility, including but not limited, to those set forth in this Complaint.

7. Plaintiff lives only several miles from the Defendants' Facility, passes by the Defendants' Facility at least once per week when he is doing errands, visiting family and friends throughout the borough, and looking to drink and eat out. Moreover, the Defendants' Facility is in a neighborhood that Plaintiff dines out two to three times per month. Foremost, Plaintiff has partaken at, and in, nearly all of the neighboring restaurants surrounding the subject facility that are all without obstructions about twice per month, including but not limited to the Dos Toros, Junzi Kitchen, Tom's Restaurant, Starbucks, and Fieldtrip Morningside amongst many others; and thereon affirms that he would eat at the Defendant's restaurant and avail himself of the goods and services offered to the public, were it not for the structural barriers inhibiting his ability to enter the subject facility, in direct contravention of Title III of the ADA and provisions under the ADAAG.

8. The Defendants' Facility is a public accommodation and service establishment, and although required by law to do so, it is not in compliance with the ADA and ADAAG. Plaintiff has visited the Subject Property which forms the basis of this lawsuit and plans to return in the coming months to the Subject Property to avail himself of the goods and services offered to the public at the Subject Property, and to determine whether the Subject Property has been made ADA compliant. Plaintiff's access to the Facility and/or full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and/or accommodations offered therein was denied and/or limited because of these disabilities, and Plaintiff will be denied and/or limited in the future unless and until Defendants are compelled to remove the physical barriers

to access and ADA violations which exist at the Facility, including but not limited, to those set forth in this Complaint.

9. Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer direct and indirect injury as a result of the ADA violations that exist at the Facility. In this instance, Plaintiff visited the Facility and encountered barriers to access at the Facility, engaged barriers, suffered legal harm and injury, and will continue to suffer legal harm and injury as a result of the illegal barriers to access as set forth herein.

10. Plaintiff visited the Facility and encountered barriers to access at the Facility no less than two times, specifically on or about the third or fourth week of October 2024, and again on or about January 15, 2025, engaged the barrier when attempting to approach the entrance door, wherein Plaintiff encountered an architectural barrier stairs, realized the wheelchair could not traverse, thus causing plaintiff to turn back and suffer legal harm and injury thereafter. There was no apparent mechanism for assistance, or other means for traversing said architectural barriers. Plaintiff will continue to suffer legal harm and injury as a result of the illegal barriers to access as set forth in greater detail herein. The Plaintiff will continue to dine out in the neighborhood of the Defendants' subject property; specifically plans to visit this subject property this summer and autumn with family and friends for nights out, and holidays and events; and will thereon continue to attempt to access the services and facilities at said premises which have been deprived at all times material.

11. All events giving rise to this lawsuit occurred in the State of New York. Venue is proper in this Court as the premises are located in the Southern District.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS AND CLAIM

12. Plaintiff attempted to access the Facility on or about October 2024 and again on January 15, 2025, but could not do so without severe hardship, because of his disabilities, and the physical barriers to access and ADA violations that exist at the Facility, which restrict and/or limit his access to the goods and services offered at the Facility. The ADA violations are more specifically set forth in this Complaint.

13. New York State Human Rights Law provides: (a) “It shall be an unlawful discriminatory practice for any person, being the owner, lessee, proprietor, manager, superintendent, agent or employee of any place of public accommodation.... because of the ... disability ... of any person, directly or indirectly, to refuse, withhold from or deny to such person any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities or privileges thereof ... to the effect that any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of any such place shall be refused, withheld from or denied to any person on account of ... disability ... NYS Exec. Law § 296 (2)(a).”

14. Plaintiff travels through this neighborhood regularly, has partaken of the services offered in nearly all the surrounding public accommodations, and thereon intends to visit the Facility again in the near future in order to utilize all of the goods and services offered therein but will be unable to do so because of the physical barriers to access, dangerous conditions and ADA violations that exist at the Facility that restrict and/or limit his access to the Facility, including those barriers conditions and ADA violations more specifically set forth in this Complaint..

15. Defendants have discriminated against Plaintiff and others with disabilities by denying access to, and full and equal enjoyment of the goods and services of the Facility, as prohibited by 42 U.S.C., § 12182, *et. seq.*, and by failing to remove architectural barriers as

required by 42 U.S.C., § 12182(b)(2)(A)(iv), and will continue to discriminate against Plaintiff and others with disabilities unless and until Defendants are compelled to remove all physical barriers that exist at the Facility, including those specifically set forth herein, and make the Facility accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities, including Plaintiff.

16. Defendants have discriminated against Plaintiff by failing to comply with the above requirements. A specific, although not exclusive, list of unlawful physical barriers, dangerous conditions and ADA violations, which preclude and/or limit Plaintiff's ability to access the Facility and full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services offered at the Facility include:

1. Inaccessible entrance.
2. Accessible route to establishment not provided as required.
3. Accessible means of egress not provided as required.
4. Existing steps leading to entrance act as a barrier to accessibility.

ADAAG 206 Accessible Routes

ADAAG 206.1 General.

Accessible routes shall be provided in accordance with 206 and shall comply with Chapter 4.

ADAAG 206.2 Where Required.

Accessible routes shall be provided where required by 206.2.

ADAAG 206.2.1 Site Arrival Points.

At least one accessible route shall be provided within the site from accessible parking spaces and accessible passenger loading zones; public streets and sidewalks; and public transportation stops to the accessible building or facility entrance they serve.

ADAAG 206.4 Entrances.

Entrances shall be provided in accordance with 206.4.

Entrance doors, doorways, and gates shall comply with 404 and shall be on an accessible route complying with 402.

ADAAG 207 Accessible Means of Egress

ADAAG 207.1 General.

Means of egress shall comply with section 1003.2.13 of the International Building Code (2000 edition and 2001 Supplement) or section 1007 of the International Building Code (2003 edition) (incorporated by reference, "Referenced Standards" in Chapter 1).

ADAAG 402 Accessible Routes

ADAAG 402.1 General.

Accessible routes shall comply with 402.

ADAAG 402.2 Components.

Accessible routes shall consist of one or more of the following components: walking surfaces with a running slope not steeper than 1:20, doorways, ramps, curb ramps excluding the flared sides, elevators, and platform lifts. All components of an accessible route shall comply with the applicable requirements of Chapter 4.

5. Required handrails not provided at both sides of steps leading to entrance.

ADAAG 505 Handrails

ADAAG 505.2 Where Required.

Handrails shall be provided on both sides of stairs and ramps.

6. Accessible routes shall be provided in accordance with 206 and shall comply with Chapter 4. Accessible routes shall be provided where required by 206.2. At least one accessible route shall be provided within the site from accessible parking spaces and accessible passenger loading zones; public streets and sidewalks; and public transportation stops to the accessible building or facility entrance they serve. Entrances shall be provided in accordance with 206.4. Entrance doors, doorways, and gates shall comply with 404 and shall be on an accessible route complying with 402. In addition to entrances required by 206.4.2 through 206.4.9, at least 60 percent of all public entrances shall comply with 404.
7. Required Minimum Maneuvering Clearance not provided at vestibule between two doors.
8. Accessible routes shall be provided in accordance with 206 and shall comply with Chapter 4.
9. Accessible routes shall be provided where required by 206.2.
10. At least one accessible route shall be provided within the site from accessible parking spaces and accessible passenger loading zones; public streets and sidewalks; and public transportation stops to the accessible building or facility entrance they serve.
11. Inaccessible Dining Area and Seating.
12. Non-compliant height of tables, chairs, maximum height allowance.
13. Inaccessible Booths, Required minimum knee and toe clearance not provided as required to be accessible not provided.

ADAAG 226 Dining Surfaces and Work Surfaces

ADAAG 226.1 General.

Where dining surfaces are provided for the consumption of food or drink, at least

5 percent of the seating spaces and standing spaces at the dining surfaces shall comply with 902.

ADAAG 902 Dining Surfaces and Work Surfaces

ADAAG 902.1 General.

Dining surfaces and work surfaces shall comply with 902.2 and 902.3.

Advisory 902.1 General.

Dining surfaces include, but are not limited to, bars, tables, lunch counters, and booths.

ADAAG 902.2 Clear Floor or Ground Space.

A clear floor space complying with 305 positioned for a forward approach shall be provided. Knee and toe clearance complying with 306 shall be provided.

ADAAG 902.3 Height.

The tops of dining surfaces and work surfaces shall be 28 inches (710 mm) minimum and 34 inches (865 mm) maximum above the finish floor or ground.

ADAAG 306.2 Toe Clearance.

ADAAG 306.2.3 Minimum Required Depth.

Where toe clearance is required at an element as part of a clear floor space, the toe clearance shall extend 17 inches (430 mm) minimum under the element.

ADAAG 306.2.5 Width.

Toe clearance shall be 30 inches (760 mm) wide minimum.

ADAAG 306.3 Knee Clearance.

ADAAG 306.3.3 Minimum Required Depth.

Where knee clearance is required under an element as part of a clear floor space, the knee clearance shall be 11 inches deep minimum at 9 inches above the ground, and 8 inches deep minimum at 27 inches (685 mm) above the finish floor or ground.

ADAAG 306.3.5 Width.

Knee clearance shall be 30 inches (760 mm) wide minimum.

14. Compliant signage identifying the restroom not provided as required.

ADAAG 216 Signs

ADAAG 216.1 General.

Signs shall be provided in accordance with 216 and shall comply with 703.

ADAAG 216.2 Designations.

Interior and exterior signs identifying permanent rooms and spaces shall comply with 703.1, 703.2, and 703.5. Where pictograms are provided as designations of permanent interior rooms and spaces, the pictograms shall comply with 703.6 and shall have text descriptors complying with 703.2 and 703.5.

Advisory 216.2 Designations.

Section 216.2 applies to signs that provide designations, labels, or names for interior rooms or spaces where the sign is not likely to change over time. Examples include interior signs labeling restrooms, room and floor numbers or letters, and room names. Tactile text descriptors are required for pictograms that are provided to label or identify a permanent room or space.

Pictograms that provide information about a room or space, such as “no

smoking,” occupant logos, and the International Symbol of Accessibility, are not required to have text descriptors.

ADAAG 703.1 General.

Signs shall comply with 703. Where both visual and tactile characters are required, either one sign with both visual and tactile characters, or two separate signs, one with visual, and one with tactile characters, shall be provided.

ADAAG 703.4.1 Height Above Finish Floor or Ground.

Tactile characters on signs shall be located 48 inches (1220 mm) minimum above the finish floor or ground surface, measured from the baseline of the lowest tactile character and 60 inches (1525 mm) maximum above the finish floor or ground surface, measured from the baseline of the highest tactile character.

ADAAG 703.4.2 Location.

Where a tactile sign is provided at a door, the sign shall be located alongside the door at the latch side. Where a tactile sign is provided at double doors with one active leaf, the sign shall be located on the inactive leaf. Where a tactile sign is provided at double doors with two active leaves, the sign shall be located to the right of the right hand door. Where there is no wall space at the latch side of a single door or at the right side of double doors, signs shall be located on the nearest adjacent wall. Signs containing tactile characters shall be located so that a clear floor space of 18 inches (455 mm) minimum by 18 inches (455 mm) minimum, centered on the tactile characters, is provided beyond the arc of any door swing between the closed position and 45 degree open position.

15. The lavatory and/or restroom is inaccessible.

16. Required minimum clear width not provided at door of the restroom.

ADAAG 206 Accessible Routes

ADAAG 206.1 General.

Accessible routes shall be provided in accordance with 206 and shall comply with Chapter 4.

ADAAG 402 Accessible Routes ADAAG 402.1 General.

Accessible routes shall comply with 402.

ADAAG 402.2 Components.

Accessible routes shall consist of one or more of the following components: walking surfaces with a running slope not steeper than 1:20, doorways, ramps, curb ramps excluding the flared sides, elevators, and platform lifts. All components of an accessible route shall comply with the applicable requirements of Chapter 4.

ADAAG 404.2.3 Clear Width.

Door openings shall provide a clear width of 32 inches (815 mm) minimum. Clear openings of doorways with swinging doors shall be measured between the face of the door and the stop, with the door open 90 degrees.

17. Required minimum maneuvering clearance not provided at door of the restrooms.

18. Non-Complaint change in the surface level at threshold of restroom.

ADAAG 206 Accessible Routes

ADAAG 206.1 General.

Accessible routes shall be provided in accordance with 206 and shall comply with Chapter 4.

ADAAG 402 Accessible Routes

ADAAG 402.1 General.

Accessible routes shall comply with 402.

ADAAG 402.2 Components.

Accessible routes shall consist of one or more of the following components: walking surfaces with a running slope not steeper than 1:20, doorways, ramps, curb ramps excluding the flared sides, elevators, and platform lifts. All components of an accessible route shall comply with the applicable requirements of Chapter 4.

ADAAG 404.2.4 Maneuvering Clearances.

Minimum maneuvering clearances at doors and gates shall comply with 404.2.4.

Maneuvering clearances shall extend the full width of the doorway and the required latch side or hinge side clearance.

19. Non-compliant door swing of door of the two restrooms.

20. The restroom door swings into the floor space of lavatory in the restroom. Required Ramp is not provided.

ADAAG 603 Toilet and Bathing Rooms

ADAAG 603.1 General.

Toilet and bathing rooms shall comply with 603.

ADAAG 603.2.3 Door Swing.

Doors shall not swing into the clear floor space or clearance required for any fixture.

21. Non-compliant door handles at restrooms; require twisting of the wrist.

ADAAG 404 Doors, Doorways, and Gates

ADAAG 404.1 General.

Doors, doorways, and gates that are part of an accessible route shall comply with 404.

ADAAG 404.2.7 Door and Gate Hardware.

Handles, pulls, latches, locks, and other operable parts on doors and gates shall comply with 309.4

ADAAG 309.4 Operation.

Operable parts shall be operable with one hand and shall not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist. The force required to activate operable parts shall be 5 pounds maximum.

22. Inaccessible water closet in the restroom..

ADAAG 604 Water Closets and Toilet Compartments

ADAAG 604.3 Clearance.

Clearances around water closets and in toilet compartments shall comply with 604.3.

ADAAG 604.3.1 Size.

Clearance around a water closet shall be 60 inches (1525 mm) minimum measured perpendicular from the side wall and 56 inches (1420 mm) minimum measured perpendicular from the rear wall.

23. Non Compliant Height of Light switches.

24. Required grab bars not provided on rear and side walls of water closet in the two restrooms.

ADAAG 604 Water Closets and Toilet Compartments

ADAAG 604.5 Grab Bars.

Grab bars for water closets shall comply with 609.

Grab bars shall be provided on the side wall closest to the water closet and on the rear wall.

25. Non-compliant height of sink. Lavatories and sinks shall be installed with the front of the higher of the rim or counter surface 34 inches (865 mm) maximum above the finish floor or ground.

26. Non-compliant height of wall mounted urinal exceeds maximum height allowance.

27. Inaccessible paper towel dispense in the restroom.

28. Non-compliant height of Mirror in the restroom. Mirrors located above lavatories or countertops shall be installed with the bottom edge of the reflecting surface 40 inches (1015 mm) maximum above the finish floor or ground. Mirrors not located above lavatories or countertops shall be installed with the bottom edge of the reflecting surface 35 inches (890 mm) maximum above the finish floor or ground.

17. The above listing is not to be considered all-inclusive of the barriers which exist at the Facility. Plaintiff requires an inspection of the Facility in order to determine all of the ADA violations.

18. The removal of the physical barriers, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations set forth herein is readily achievable and can be accomplished and carried out without much difficulty or expense. 42 U.S.C. § 12182(B)(2)(A)(iv); 42 U.S.C. § 12181(9); 28 C.F.R. § 36.304.

19. Plaintiff is without adequate remedy at law, is suffering irreparable harm, and reasonably anticipates that he will continue to suffer irreparable harm unless and until Defendants are required to remove the physical barriers, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations that exist at the Facility, including those set forth herein.

20. The Plaintiff has been obligated to retain undersigned counsel for the filing and prosecution of this action. The Plaintiff is entitled to have his reasonable attorney's fees, costs and expenses paid by the Defendants, pursuant to 42 U.S.C., §§ 12205 and 12217.

21. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §12188(a), this Court is provided with authority to grant injunctive relief to Plaintiff, including an order to alter the Facility to make it readily accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities to the extent required by the ADA, and closing the Facility until the requisite modifications are completed.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the Court issue a permanent injunction enjoining Defendants from continuing its discriminatory practices, ordering Defendants to remove the physical barriers to access and alter the Facility to make it readily accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities to the extent required by the ADA, closing the Facility until the barriers are removed and requisite alterations are completed, and awarding Plaintiff his reasonable attorney's fees, expert fees, costs and litigation expenses incurred in this action.

Respectfully submitted

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